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ABSTRACT

Students for Safer Sexuality is a peer education program designed to train 11th and 12th graders to be key agents in the delivery of sexuality education, HIV prevention, and communication skills programs. There were 15 students involved in the first year and 20 students currently involved. Participants are trained to lead discussion groups, present skits and information, and help improve communication and decision-making skills. This paper provides an overview of the program, lists the resources used, and provides suggestions for implementing similar programs. (JE)

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Students For Safer Sexuality

A Peer Education program addressing The postponement of sexual involvement and The prevention of unwanted pregnancy, HIV and other Sexually Transmitted Diseases.

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General Description:

Students For Safer Sexuality is a Peer Education Program designed to train 11th and 12th graders to be key agents in the delivery of Sexuality Education, HIV Prevention and Communication Skills programs. The basis of the program is the recognition that, when addressing difficult issues, often young people are better able to reach their peers than adults. Consequently, this program works to educate a small group of interested students about a wide variety of sexuality and HIV related issues. Participants are trained to lead discussion groups, present skits and information, and help improve communication and decision-making skills. Students involved have gone on to lead programs for middle school students, high school peers, and parents, as well as making presentations at other schools and a variety of conferences.

Students involved in this program self select, but a majority have had training in our Peer Facilitator program as well. There were 15 students involved in the first year and 20 students are currently involved. Participants in this type of peer education program need to have the maturity and understanding to deal with a complex web of challenging issues. We recommend using juniors and seniors, and only those students truly willing to make the commitment necessary for a successful program.

There are currently two Waynflete faculty who work as advisors to the program, one male and one female. In addition, Cathy Kidman of The AIDS Project is a program advisor.

Purposes/Goals/Objectives:

General Goal:

To empower students to help raise awareness, educate themselves and their peers, and effect behavioral change on both a personal and community level.

Outreach program Goals:

1. Acknowledge and encourage those who choose not to be sexually active.
2. Raise student awareness and teach prevention skills regarding STD's, HIV and unwanted pregnancy.
3. To encourage the practice of Safer Sexuality, which includes:
    a. Abstinence or postponement of sexual involvement,
    b. Alternatives to intercourse, and
    c. The use of pregnancy and STD prevention methods including latex barriers.
4. To assist peers in the development of sound communication and decision-making skills concerning sexuality and IV drug use.
5. To provide access to information concerning contraception and STD prevention materials.
6. To provide an opportunity for open dialogue concerning sexuality, substances and behavior.

Resources:

Training of student participants is the key element in the success of this program. Training has been carried out by school staff and educators from The AIDS Project and Planned Parenthood of Northern New England. We used an initial 8 hour training session followed by two hour weekly meetings outside of the school day. The training addresses abstinence and postponement of sexual activity, alternatives to intercourse, decision-making and communication skills, sexual orientation, pregnancy, STD and HIV prevention, values and personal boundaries, setting sexual limits, substances and sexuality, interactive theater and presenting skills.

Resources Used:

A variety of resource materials are used both in training participants and in designing outreach presentations. They include:

Guide to Implementing TAP, Teens for AIDS Prevention
Advocates For Youth. Washington, D.C.... 203-347-5700 ($35)

Teaching Safer Sex. Planned Parenthood of Northern New Jersey. Peggy Brick. (contact Maine State Dept. of Education, Joanie Foster)

SFSS Program training notebook. (Compilation of appropriate information and activity materials.)

Not Yet Ready For Bedtime Players Theater Manual-UMASS Peer Educators Manual-
UMass Health Center, Amherst, Mass. ($35)
Contact Gretchen Krull- (413-549-2761)

HOPE IS VITAL- Michael Rohd- Owens Mills, Md.
An interactive theater workshop designed specifically for HIV prevention programs. ($600)

"Leading the Way on Controversial Issues"
Mary Madden, Family Planning Association of Maine.

Available through Dept. of Education (Brenda Gross) 287-5118

Materials:

A comfortable room that allows for sitting in a circle and has movable chairs is desirable. A TV/VCR is helpful for training films. Newsprint, magic markers and access to word-processing facilities are helpful. We also utilize anatomical models, as well as examples of latex barriers in some of our programs.

Expenses:

This program can be carried out for very little expense, or be somewhat costly, depending on the skills and resourcefulness of the staff involved.

We spent $50 on markers, paper and notecards for programs, and relied on donations of time and other materials from other community agencies.

The largest "expense" is staff time. Neither staff member was stipended for time devoted to this program. Time required from each staff member varied from 12 to 30+ hours per month depending on the time of year and projects in development.

Outside resources:

As mentioned, this program utilizes a variety of community resources including several staff members from the AIDS Project and Planned Parenthood, representatives from OUTRIGHT (Gay, Lesbian and Bisexual Youth support group), as well as field trips to local clinics, HIV counseling and testing sites and representatives from the local community of people living with HIV.

Important Note:

For a variety of reasons, other schools may not be able to do some of the training or outreach activities currently done by this group. Careful attention must be paid to developing administrative and community support. It is important that administrators and students be a part of the conception and design of any program dealing with sensitive topics such as these. It is also vital that abstinence and postponement of sexual activity be a major and visible focus in all programmatic activities. Be sure to work within the acceptable parameters in your school or district.

Timely and thoughtful communication with parents of participants must also be carried out. We send out letters of explanation about the program at the start of training each year. We encourage the use of permission slips that require that parents read and understand the goals and purposes of the program, as well as the topics to be covered in training and presentations.

It is also important that student participants understand the responsibility that comes with being ambassadors of the program. We have found it helpful to have dialogue about the reality of being under the "community microscope", and the importance of modeling the skills, attitudes, and behaviors encouraged in our programs.

Procedures:

To mention all of the procedures that have been helpful would be a mammoth task. Therefore, below is a list of key ideas that might be useful to you in designing a program.

1. Involve students from the start. Their investment and thinking is critical.
2. Draw up a mission statement that is agreeable to all participants and to the administration at your school.
3. Set up an achievable timeline for training and programs and be sure to:
   a. Involve students in the planning.

b. Remember that everything will take you longer than you think.
c. Keep a bulletin board with a calendar so that students know when program commitments occur, are aware of the meeting agendas, and understand their responsibilities.
d. Take time to recognize accomplishments.
e. To maximize the efficiency of meetings, divide them up into workable segments.
f. When planning for programs or practicing skills, break out into smaller groups whenever feasible. This will greatly enhance the effectiveness of meeting time.

4. Utilize community resources to help in the planning and training processes.
5. As your first group task, establish groundrules for meetings that will allow for the development of trust, responsibility, and openness.
6. Be sure to incorporate play and fun into your processes.

Conclusion:

Although school staff are doing a great deal to help educate young people about sexuality issues and HIV prevention, many of today's teens are not acting on the information they receive. Peers are the most potent resource available to help raise awareness and effect positive behavior changes. Students also want to participate and make a difference where HIV and teen sexuality is concerned. This program allows for students to educate themselves and their peers and contribute positively in helping combat this epidemic. Responsible Peer Education/Awareness programs dealing with HIV and sexuality issues are critical in helping to change attitudes and behavior and enhance the climate of a school.